

Manchester Testimony 2

I do not want to give my name. I'm from Nigeria. I was detained in 2010. I went to Lunar House to claim asylum. They kept me and told me to wait. After a few hours they put me in a bus. The windows were covered and I was scared and panic. My breathe was like this - short quick breaths. They didn't tell me what was happening where I was going. I had nothing with me- no clothes, no medication.

1) Your experiences of living in immigration detention, including the context and duration of your stay

I was in detention in Yarl's Wood for 2 months. I don't know why I was detained. I don't have leave to remain - I have been waiting 4 years since 2010.

We were 2 in a room and had to sleep in bunk beds which I didn't like. I didn't feel I could speak to the other woman in the room - reasons given- fear, she seemed hostile, worried her reaction. It was like torture physical and mental (she emphasised this feeling of torture several times in the conversation) No privacy - men came into the bathrooms and toilets - male guards when women were using the facilities.

People shouting all the time. At night guards drag women on to the floor and put them in handcuffs. When they resist the guards hit them with a stick. I saw this happening in the corridor at night. They threatened if I say anything I would get it. It made me terrified to say anything. I was scared all the time I was there. I felt like killing myself.

2) The conditions in immigration detention, including your ability to access services such as legal advice, healthcare, pastoral support;

No information or advice in there. No access to a lawyer. I asked but no one came for a very long time. My 2 friends helped me get a lawyer.

Felt no one inside helped me. My friends visited. It helped a lot but was hard when they left.

3) Whether there were appropriate mechanisms to deal with any mental, physical or emotional issues you may have experienced prior to or during your time in detention;

I needed medication but I couldn't see a doctor. I told one of the guards I was hearing voices in my head but I didn't get to see a doctor in there. Nurses saw me but wouldn't give me medication. I was very low, down scared, weak. I couldn't eat properly and got very skinny. A doctor helped me when I came out.

4) Any longer-term impacts of detention on you, your family and/or your wider community;

My friends say I am strange now but I don't know. Some mental problems (didn't want to talk about them). I get flashbacks any time. I don't sleep. I walk along the road then get a flashback. I feel scared am always frightened people are coming to pick (detain) me.

I am getting counselling and support but am still scared. I feel very stressed when I go to sign at Dallas Court. I have to sit in a locked room and I get phobia - it feels like dying.

5) Any other information about detention that you would like to share;

You come to save your life, to find refuge. In detention it felt like dying is better. Sometimes it still feels like that but outside I have support - doctors, WAST, friends, other groups.

6) How far does the current detention system support the needs of vulnerable detainees, including pregnant women, detainees with a disability and young adults?

Women should not be detained. It is like mental torture for them. When you torture people it doesn't make them better. Pregnant women lost their babies when I was there.

7) There is currently no time limit on immigration detention – in your view what are the impacts (if any) of this?

You are not given any information about how long you will have to stay. It feels like you will be there forever. It feels like prison. I was worried about being taken to a plane.

8) What are the wider consequences of the current immigration detention system, including any financial and/or social implications?

Not being allowed to work is torture. I'm not well but I need to do something to keep busy, Section 4 vouchers - but I can't go anywhere, do anything, visit friends to make me feel better.

9) How effective are the current UK alternatives to detention (e.g. bail, reporting requirements)? Are viable alternatives to immigration detention in operation in other countries?

Signing at Dallas Court is hard, very frightening.

10) Tell us what wishes you have for change to the UK detention system...

Close detention centres. These women can't run away. It is hard on health - I feel better outside.

Make quicker decisions - waiting 4 years is torture and you have no life - but fair decisions. Look properly into cases - no more snap decisions.

Allow us to work.